



NIRSA JDEI
Organizational
Climate Assessment

Executive Summary


In the summer of 2020, against a backdrop of a renewed call for reckoning with systemic racism, the NIRSA Board and Executive Director identified and prioritized the need to assess members' experiences related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the Association. The NIRSA Board asked the Executive Director to find external expertise with the objectivity and capacity for this work. 2020-2021 NIRSA President David Davenport appointed a review team to assist with request for proposal evaluation and recommendation. The NIRSA Foundation Board stepped up and committed financial support from the Mission Advancement Fund. In March 2021, the NIRSA Board formally adopted a strategic priority for the association to strive for inclusive excellence through anti-racist and pro-equity lenses.

Process to select 122 Consulting

A Request for Proposal was sent to eight leading EDI consultants and consulting firms in October 2020. Responses were evaluated by a 16-member review team comprised of three Board representatives, 10 NIRSA members, and three NIRSA HQ staff. The review team conducted interviews with finalists and ultimately recommended diversity strategists [**122 Consulting Group**](#) (122) to the NIRSA Board.

The Board approved the Steering Committee's recommendation to engage 122, a women and Black-owned consulting firm with experience in higher education and associations. The NIRSA Foundation provided the funding for the Climate Study from its mission advancement fund.

In early 2021, the EDI Steering Committee was formed to work with 122 and guide NIRSA's Climate Assessment process. The EDI Steering Committee was comprised of NIRSA members, NIRSA Board members, and NIRSA HQ staff, including some of the people who served on the review team. The Steering Committee represented a range of identities and spanned a range of career levels.



In spring 2021, NIRSA and 122 embarked on a climate assessment initiative to gather data about the ways NIRSA members were experiencing the association through a lens of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (JDEI). Specifically, the climate assessment phase probed members' attitudes, experiences, and opinions.

Assessment process

The Sustained Impact Model (SIM) used by 122 is an intentional framework for organizational change anchored by JDEI principles. SIM demonstrates the progressive and comprehensive approach to strategic development and leadership for iterative change and innovation. This development model is also embedded into 122 assessment metrics.

NIRSA's EDI Steering Committee worked with 122 to facilitate a phased organizational assessment that included EDI Steering Committee engagement, JDEI Organizational Self-Assessment, focus groups, and an online climate assessment. The design of the samples, questionnaires, and supporting materials were guided through input by the EDI Steering Committee. The EDI Steering Committee also provided feedback on focus group composition so that they represented diverse segments of the membership. Focus groups included existing identity-based caucuses and other segments of membership.

Key findings

Based on their key findings, 122 identified several themes: Leadership and Operations; Member Experiences; Membership Needs; Membership Value; Opinions on EDI; Personal and Professional Journey; and Sense of Belonging. The full report describes themes and key findings inferred from focus group and online survey responses. While most survey respondents generally have positive experiences and perceptions of NIRSA membership, a deeper analysis of the data through the lens of demographic characteristics highlighted some significant differences.

Overview of challenges

The contrasting calls for increased focus on EDI advocacy and initiatives alongside concerns about too much emphasis on EDI topics indicated significant values misalignment across NIRSA membership and reveals a concerted effort to reconcile EDI rhetoric with the regular experiences of NIRSA members. NIRSA has not yet socialized its EDI values or developed a shared language and analysis about EDI. This misalignment has impacted day-to-day interactions within the association, especially for underrepresented members.

Further, little support exists for members to raise concerns about discrimination within the membership or for people to share vulnerable experiences safely.

Additionally, NIRSA's structure reinforces a siloed, on-campus experience for many members, with the knowledge of navigating the association gained only through experience and connections.

There is a significant issue with trust and accountability with leadership. For many members, the level of confidence in leadership is dictated by proximity and relationships with organizational leaders (Board members, Executive Director, and members of NIRSA Headquarters staff).

Overview of opportunities

NIRSA can take affirmative steps to reinforce the organization's continued commitment to JDEI. NIRSA's strengths include loyal members with a solid commitment to cultivating a culture of belonging, learning, growth, and change. Additionally, many members have strong knowledge of JDEI topics and access campus resources to support NIRSA's JDEI journey. This knowledge represents a solid foundation for the JDEI strategy, which NIRSA can build.

Call to action

In the report, 122 provides recommendations and actions for NIRSA to consider prioritizing within our renewed JDEI strategy. The call to action is summarized below:

- Build a clearer process for members to report grievances or concerns about exclusionary behavior
- Cultivate a robust curriculum for JDEI member education that's driven by NIRSA Headquarters, NIRSA's Board, and NIRSA committee leadership (top-down versus member-driven initiatives)
- Develop a set of shared norms and language for JDEI
- Focus organizational resources on cultivating of relationships with minority-serving institutions
- Implement inclusive hiring practices
- Improve vision, mission, and strategic plan to reinforce shared JDEI language and values
- Increase transparency and accountability for Board and Headquarters leadership
- Practice inclusive membership recruitment
- Review all policies for equity concerns, including language

Limitations

Throughout the final report it is noted that the low response rate limited the ability for the results of this analysis to be generalized to the greater population of NIRSA members. The low numbers could indicate that some important identity-related factors are impacting members' experiences that may not have surfaced in this report.

Conclusion and next steps

In early 2022, a draft report was reviewed by the Steering Committee, the three NIRSA Boards, the Member Network, Assembly, and NIRSA Headquarters Executive Team. Feedback and recommendations from the various leadership groups were shared with the Steering Committee who made recommendation for prioritized actions to the NIRSA Board. In March 2022, the NIRSA Board reviewed the recommendations and made commitments for the next steps. Subsequently, the NIRSA Board hosted an online webinar and in-person session at the 2022 NIRSA Annual Conferences to share key findings and next steps.

The final report was delivered by 122 in the spring. This publicly available executive summary is supplemental to the full report, which is available exclusively to NIRSA members.

An implementation team comprised of NIRSA leadership and members will be appointed to lead the action steps through this strategic plan cycle (2021-2024). Smaller groups of members will be engaged along the way for specific tasks. Recruitment for the implementation team will begin in the summer of 2022. In addition to the action steps, the NIRSA Board has committed to a robust and transparent communication strategy as we move through this work.